

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the claims according to the following listing of the claims, which should replace all previous versions of the claims.

Claim Listing

1 – 25. (Canceled)

26. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a component, comprising:

continuously providing a plurality of aluminum-coated steel blanks at a first rate to a first continuous process, wherein the first continuous process comprises:

successively heating [[an]]each of the plurality of aluminum-coated steel blanks to an austenization temperature in a first furnace selected from the group consisting of a continuous furnace and a revolving furnace;

successively, rapidly cooling [[said]]each of the blanks;

storing said heat treated blank at room temperature for an interval of time;

successively removing each of the blanks from the first continuous process;

placing each of the blanks in an intermediate storage;

cooling each of the blanks in the intermediate storage to form a plurality of sheet bars, each having a martensitic structure;

in a second continuous process that is decoupled from the first continuous process;

retrieving at least one of the plurality of sheet bars from the intermediate storage with a transport device;

supplying the at least one sheet bar to an induction furnace via the transport device at a second rate that is different from the first rate;

heating said cooled, heat treated blank a second time the at least one sheet bar in the induction furnace to an austenization temperature greater than or equal to 850°C; and

forming-said blank while heated the heated sheet bar to produce said component.

27. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 wherein the interval of the initial heating of said blank is residence time in the first furnace is in the range of 9 to 30 minutes.
28. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 wherein the conditions of the second heat treatment in the induction furnace are controlled so as not to increase the layer thickness of the blank sheet bar.
29. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 wherein the interval of the subsequent heating of said blank residence time in the induction furnace is in the range of 10 seconds to 2 ½ minutes.
30. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 including, further comprising varying the heat applied to different portions of the surface of the blank.
31. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 including, further comprising reinforcing said blank between the first heating and the second heating.
32. (Cancelled)
33. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26, wherein the first heating step causes further comprising causing an increase in layer thickness of the aluminum coating.
- 34 – 44. (Cancelled)
45. (New) The method according to claim 26, wherein the transport device is an articulated arm robot.